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A STUDY OF THE COMPONENTS OF FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

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TWO HUNDRED REPRESENTATIVE ADULTS AGED 21-69 IN EIGHT NORTHEAST NEBRASKA COUNTIES, WERE STUDIED TO DETERMINE COMPONENTS OF FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS (DEFINED IN TERMS OF EXPRESSED LEARNING INTEREST). EARLIER RESEARCH HAD ESTABLISHED THAT PARTICIPATION MAY BE DEFINED IN TERMS OF EXPRESSED LEARNING INTEREST, AND THAT AGE, EDUCATIONAL BADKGROUND, PAST PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION, AND MEMBERSHIP IN VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ARE RELATED TO PARTICIPATION. THROUGH THE PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATION AND A PARTIAL CORRELATION TECHNIQUE THE PRESENT STUDY DETERMINED THAT VARIABLES PREVIOUSLY CORRELATED WITH PARTICIPATION WERE ALSO SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED TO EXPRESSED LEARNING INTEREST AND THAT KNOWLEDGE OF EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (A NEW VARIABLE) WAS ALSO SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED. THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS WERE AS FOLLOWS--(1) EXPRESSED INTEREST IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IS USEFUL IN PREDICTING FUTURE ADULT EDUCATION PARTICIPATION--(2) PARTICIPATION PRIOR TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR HAS LESS PREDICTIVE VALUE THAN PARTICIPATION DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR--(3) KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES IS THE PRINCIPAL INDEPENDENT VARIABLE IN EXPRESSED LEARNING INTEREST--AND (4) PARTICIPATION PRIOR TO THE PREVIOUS YEAR IS THE ONLY INSIGNIFICANT VARIABLE. THE DOCUMENT INCLUDES THREE TABLES AND 18 REFERENCES. (LY)

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# A STUDY OF THE COMPONENTS OF FUTURE PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

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Are some adults more responsive to adult educational programs than others? That is, (1) Can participation in these educational programs be defined in terms of learning interest? (2) Do some possess a greater degree of learning interest and participate in educational activities more during their adult life than others? (3) What are the character traits of those individuals who possess a high degree of learning interest? (4) Are there traits as yet unreported which might be important components of learning interest and future participation? Previous research has given us clues for answering some of these questions.

Thorndike (1) proposed that if one increases interest, one increases participation. MacIver and Page (2) stated that "man's interests are those items to which he devotes his attention. Our own external behavior is an expression of our own attitudes and interests." Dennis (3) concluded that the study of human interests was for the most part the study of activities and that these activities are the best indicators of interests. Further, he indicated that interests will determine future participation in a given activity. According to Knox (4) interests involve a choice between activities on the part of the participant. If interests involve a choice among alternate courses of action, then what a person does is a good index of his interest and vice versa. From the foregoing, it is suggested that interest in learning is antecedent to participation in educational programs and therefore may be indicative of future participation.

Considerable research (Scantland 5, Martin 6, Chang 7, Slocum 8, Stonecipher 9, Coleman 10, Hay 11, Scaff 12, and Shoptaw 13) has established a negative relationship between age and participation in adult educational activities. Studies reported by Scantland (5), Coleman (10),

Hay (11), and Shoptaw (13) have demonstrated that, in general, participants of adult educational activities are middle-aged, have a higher level of education, and participate in various kinds of educational and community oriented activities more than non-adult-educational-participants. Tomilson (14) has suggested that those with more education, rather than less, seek further education in adult life. Verner and Newberry (15) concurred when they found after examination and study of previous research, that the most significant determinant of participation in adult educational activities seemed to be the amount of earlier formal school experience. London and Carey (16) have suggested that those adults who tend to join voluntary associations are more likely to be interested and hence participate in adult educational activities than those who do not join these types of organizations. Knox and Videbeck (17) determined that participation within the last year is a more reliable measure of future adult educational participation than participation prior to the last year.

From the foregoing, it would seem that an adult who has (1) graduated from high school, (2) within the age bracket 35-44, (3) a member of some voluntary organizations, and (5) has participated within the last year in educational activities would have the highest learning interest and hence participation record in future adult educational activities.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Previous research has suggested that age, educational background (and intelligence), participation prior to and within the last year in educational activities, and number of organizations to which an individual belongs all have an effect on this individual's learning interest and participation in educational activities within adult life.

We believe that there is another variable vital to a description of the adult who possesses a degree of learning interest greater than his counterparts. This variable is Knowledge of Educational Resources. Knowledge of Resources is a tri-dimensional characteristic related to educational activities. It includes (1) the amount of awareness of educational activities and facilities; (2) the ability of the individual to locate educational facilities and (3) whether the use the individual has made of these educational facilities.

Our research question becomes the following: Is rural adult knowledge of educational resources related to participant's learning interest hence future participation in educational activities during adult life; and, if it is related, is knowledge of educational resources a more important variable in the framework of future participation than those characteristics which have been found in previous literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At any point in time within the adult life, the individual cannot change his age, his educational background, alter the number of organizations to which he belongs, or change the fact of his participation or non-participation in adult educational activities. The individual can alter at any point in time the degree of awareness that he has of educational activities; can gain information about the location of these educational activities; and we can, through various information agencies demonstrate the benefit that this individual may gain from a program of particular educational nature.

But, will this variable, knowledge of resources, be as important as the well-defined and established variables of age, educational, level, participation prior to or within the last year, and number of organizations

to which an individual belongs in its effect on participation in adult educational programs?

Since Knowledge of Resources is an event that is not dependent upon the static characteristics of the individual it would be an easy manipulative device to increase participation in adult educational activities. For this reason, it is necessary to investigate the importance of this variable to an adult's learning interest; for an individual's expressed interest in learning is the closest we can come to estimating future participation in educational activities.

HYPOTHESES:

On the basis of literature cited and the envolvement of the theoretical framework of the following hypotheses stated in question form are derived.

1. Are the variables age, education level, previous participation records, and number of organizations which have been established as effecting participation, also correlated with expressed learning interest?*
2. Will the additional variable entitled knowledge of educational resources be related to the established variables, and correlated with expressed learning interest?*
3. Which characteristic among those cited has the greatest potential effect upon expressed learning interest?*

SAMPLE

The sample included 200 adult respondents aged 21 to 69 who were selected to constitute a representative cross section of the total adult population of eight predominately rural counties in one Midwestern State

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* operationally defined in terms of future participation

(Nebraska). Households were selected by use of a table of random numbers, from enumeration lists in each of eight Northeast Nebraska Counties. A probability table was used to select the respondent from all eligible adults in each household, so that the variety of adult roles within the households would be adequately represented in the total sample. The characteristics of the sample of 200 adult coincided very closely with those for the adults in this age group in the eight county area in terms of age distribution, proportion of men and women, distribution of occupational types, size of community, race, marital status, and general categories of level of education.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The independent variables included in the present study are: (1) age; (2) educational background; (3) previous participation records in adult educational programs, (considering participation prior to and participation within the last year); (4) number of voluntary organizations to which a participant belongs, and (5) knowledge of educational resources. The dependent variable is expressed learning interest in educational activities.

To establish whether the independent variables were related to interest and if the independent variable knowledge of educational resources was related to the other independent variables the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was employed. To determine which of the independent variables had the greatest effect upon the dependent variable, expressed learning Interest, a process of elimination known as partial correlations was used. This process was used to determine which independent variable had the most pronounced depressive effect upon the correlates of the dependent variable (interest). Thus, that independent

variable which when held constant lowered the dependent variable correlations with the remaining independent variables to the greatest degree, was said to have the most pronounced effect on the dependent variable.

TESTING INSTRUMENTS AND DATA GATHER PROCEDURES

To obtain data, a survey instrument was developed from the Baseline Study (17) and the "NORC Volunteers for Learning" Questionnaire found in Johnstone (18). Further suggestions on construction of this instrument were forwarded by Alan Knox (Center for Adult Education, Teacher's College, Columbia, New York City, N.Y.) and Duane E. Loewenstein (one of the present authors).

Information was obtained as to (1) amount of knowledge participant has as to the resources and programs available in the area of adult educational activities; (2) age level; (3) educational background; (4) participation records in adult educational activities;;(5) organization to which a participant belonged, and (6) an index of the participants expressed learning interest and intent to participate in adult educational activities.

The project data were collected by means of an interview schedule and administered by trained interviewers during a four week period. All interviews were conducted in approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

Data were coded by the interviewers preceding analyzation by computer. The data were normalized so the appropriate parametric means of analysis could be performed.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented below in regards to each of the hypotheses.

Hypothesis I: ARE THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES RELATED TO THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE (EXPRESSED LEARNING INTEREST)? The data relevant to this hypo-

thesis are presented in Table I. The data indicate (1) a high negative relationship between the independent variable age, and the dependent variable; (2) correlations between the dependent variable and the other independent variables were positive and significant exeept (3) the correlation between the Interest variable and independent variable-participation-prior-to-the-last-year. The high negative correlation between the independent variable age and the dependent variable interest has also been established in previous research (Scantland 5, Martin 7, Chang 7, Slocum 8, Stonecipher 9, Coleman 10, Hay 11, Scaff 12, and Shoptaw 13). The insignificant relationship found between the interest variable and the participation-prior-to-last-year variable substantiated the findings of Knox and Videbeck (17) that participation within the last year is a more reliable measure of future adult participation than participation prior to the last year.

Hypothesis 2: IS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE, KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES RELATED TO THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AGE, EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND, PARTICIPATION RECORDS, NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS; AND SPECIFICALLY IS THIS KNOWLEDGE OF RESOURCES VARIABLE SIGNIFICANTLY RELATED TO INTEREST? The data relevant to this hypothesis is presented in Table II. The data indicate high correlations between the variable knowledge of educational resources and the other independent variables. The correlation between the knowledge of resources variable and the interest variable was well above the .01 level (.41).

Hypothesis 3: WHAT ONE INDEPENDENT VARIABLE AMONG ALL THOSE CITED HAS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL EFFECT UPON INTEREST (OPERATIONALLY DEFINED IN TERMS OF FUTURE PARTICIPATION? The data relevant to this

hypothesis is presented in Table III. The data indicate that when the Independent variable knowledge of educational resources was held constant, the average relationship between the dependent variable Interest and the remaining independent variables dropped below significance. When Educational Background was held constant, the relationship between interest and the remaining variables remained insignificant. However, when age, participation, number of organizations, prior participation (in descending order of effect) were held constant the average relationship between the interest variables and the independent variables were significant. Thus, a descending order of effect upon the Interest variable was established.

SUMMARY

The present study posed questions concerning future participation (defined in terms of expressed learning interest) in adult educational programs. Answers to these questions suggested were based on previous research and the present study. Previous research established that (1) participation may be defined in terms of expressed learning interest; and (2) age, educational background, participation records (participation within the last year and participation prior to the last year), and the number of organizations to which a participant belonged are all related to participation in adult educational programs. The present study determined that (1) those variables previously correlated with participation were likewise significantly related to expressed learning interest; and (2) the characteristic knowledge of educational resources, a new variable, was also significantly related to expressed learning interest. Further, this latter characteristic the greatest depressive effect upon the dependent variable, expressed learning interest.

The relationship of these characteristics to the Interest variable was established through use of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a partial correlation technique.. All of the established characteristics (age; educational background; participation records, within the last year, and prior to last year-and number of organizations to which a participant belonged) were found to be significantly related to the dependent variable (learning interest) with the exception of the variable participation-prior-to-last-year. The variable knowledge of educational resources was found to be highly related to the established components of participation in adult educational programs, and further, was significantly related to the interest variable. The characteristic that had the greatest depressive effect upon the interest correlates was knowledge of educational resources.

CONCLUSIONS:

Based on the preceding, the following conclusions were made:

1. The characteristic expressed learning interest in educational activities (defined operationally in terms of future participation) may be used to estimate future participation in adult educational programs, if future participation is defined in terms of learning interest.

2. The variable knowledge that the individual has of educational resources should be assessed in the prediction of future adult education participation.

3. Participation-prior-to-the-last-year in adult educational activities is not as good as predictor of future participation as participation-within-the-last year.

4. The variable knowledge of educational resources is the most

important factor in the make up of the dependent variable learning interest, with (1) educational background, (2) age, (3) participation within the last year, (4) number of organizations to which a participant belongs, and (5) participation prior to the last year following in descending order of effect upon learning interest.

Therefore, to increase participation, age, eductional background, participation within the last year, and the number of organizations to which a participant belongs should be given consideration with special attention to increasing the individual's knowledge of educational resources.

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TABLE I

Correlations Between the Dependent Variable Learning 'Interest'

Any One of the Dependent Variables

| Other Variable | Age | Educational Background | Previous Participation *PP | ** PW | no. of organization | KR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interest | -.238 | .283 | .054 | .196 | .229 | .415 |

Significant at .05 level .134
Significant at .01 level .181

* Participation prior to last year
** Participation within the last year

TABLE II

Correlations Between Knowledge of Resources and the Other Variables

| | Age Level | Educational Background | Participation Prior to Last Year | Participation Within the Last Year | Number of Organizations to Which a Participant Belongs | Expressed Learning Interest |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Knowledge of Educational Resources | -.194 | .348 | .122 | .389 | .406 | .415 |

Significant at .05 level .134
Significant at .01 level .181